

Monday, June 21, 2021



# AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

## GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

Last week, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced the temporary suspension of the importation of dogs from countries classified as high risk for canine rabies, or of those arriving from countries not considered a high risk if the dogs have been in a high-risk country during the previous six months. However, new reports indicate that another actual importation of an infected dog may have triggered CDC's action. The new report adds to three other cases of rabid dogs being imported into the U.S. in recent years.

Earlier this month, a dog imported by an animal rescue organization from Azerbaijan to the United States tested positive for rabies. The dog was one of 34 animals that was part of a shipment to O'Hare International Airport in Chicago on June 10. The dog had ultimately been placed with a family in Chester County, Pennsylvania, before symptoms had become apparent and the dog was tested and later euthanized.

The animals were not in the main cabin of the plane they traveled by or in the main terminal of the airport. While travelers through O'Hare are not considered to be at risk, at least 12 people are known to have been exposed to the dog. Health officials in Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania are collaborating with federal agencies to track down the new owners of the other imported pets to see if other animals in the shipment have been infected.

The CDC estimates that approximately 1 million dogs are imported into the U.S. annually, of which 100,000 dogs are from countries at high-risk of canine rabies variant virus (CRVV). In its formal announcement, CDC cited the temporary limitation as a step needed to protect the public health against the reintroduction of canine variant rabies into the United States, particularly while public health resources at the Federal, state, and local levels have become limited due to the global effort to eradicate COVID-19, including CDC's agency-wide effort.

The U.S. was declared rabies-free for canine variant rabies in 2007. CDC reports that the importation of just one dog infected with CRVV risks re-introduction of the virus into the U.S., and results in increased risks to public health, potential loss of human and animal life, and subsequent monetary costs. The CDC estimates the public health investigations and subsequent cost of care for people exposed to rabid dogs to cost

between \$215,000 and \$509,000 per importation event. In one 2019 case, the importation of a single dog with rabies cost more than \$400,000 for the public health investigations and rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) of exposed persons.

[Click here to read CDC's announcement.](#)

Rabies virus is primarily transmitted through direct contact (such as through broken skin or mucous membranes in the eyes, nose, or mouth) with saliva or brain/nervous system tissue from an infected animal, and infects the central nervous system. In the U.S., rabies is mostly found in wild animals like bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. However, in many other countries dogs still carry rabies, and most rabies deaths in people around the world are caused by dog bites. If a person becomes infected and does not receive the appropriate medical care after a potential rabies exposure, the virus can cause disease in the brain, ultimately resulting in death.

The American Kennel Club (AKC) supports the selective and responsible importation of adequately vaccinated dogs from overseas, but also recognizes the [grave health threat that the import of unhealthy dogs presents to US populations](#). [In an earlier post](#), Sheila Goffe, Vice President, Government Relations for AKC, noted, “We realize this temporary ban may present some short-term inconveniences to responsible breeders and exhibitors; however, we appreciate and strongly support the CDC’s leadership in taking a firm strong approach to protect the long-term health of U.S. pet and public health. We hope the temporary ban can soon be replaced by a more nuanced approach that requires improved health reporting for all dogs imported into the US but allows for importing healthy dogs from a wide variety of countries. “

AKC, along with the American Veterinary Medical Association, National Animal Interest Alliance, and other animal organizations strongly support the Healthy Dog Importation Act, which would require that all imported canine be free of infection, adequately vaccinated and/or protected against contagious diseases, present a health certificate from a U.S. approved veterinary authority, and have permanent identification such as a microchip. AKC looks forward to reintroduction of the Healthy Dog Importation Act in the near future.

Individuals concerned with CDC’s temporary suspension of importation of dogs from countries classified as high risk for canine rabies are encouraged to contact:

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For more information regarding CDC regulations for the importation of dogs, contact:  
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AKC Government Relations (GR) will continue to provide updates. For more information, contact AKC GR at [doglaw@akc.org](mailto:doglaw@akc.org).